1: Kroeber E-5 (1901) 1908
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INTRODUCTION.

The following information on the Gros Ventre was collected in the winter and early spring of 1901, at the Fort Belknap Reservation in northern Montana, as part of the Mrs. Morris K. Jesup Expedition. Very few of the statements made, unless such is obviously the case, are based on observation. In general, where nothing is said to the contrary, they are founded on statements made by the Indians. The introductory explanations that have been made in regard to the Arapaho[1] apply also to the following material. The alphabet used for rendering Gros Ventre words is the same as that employed for Arapaho. Additional sounds are ö and ü, which are open, and k', a palatal k.

TRIBAL ORGANIZATION.

The Gros Ventre call themselves "Haānininin." The meaning of this term is sometimes given as "lime-men" or "chalk-men," from haā'a"tyi ("lime" or "soft white stone"). This etymology is, however, doubtful. In literature they have often been known as the "Atsina." They declare this to be the Piegan name for themselves, atsöna". Historically the Gros Ventre are known to have formed an independent tribe closely associated with the Blackfeet during the nineteenth century. Their dialect is similar to the Arapaho, and certainly intelligible to the Arapaho for at least the greater part. The two dialects are, however, sufficiently differentiated to make it certain that the tribes have been more or less distinct for a longer period than two centuries. The Arapaho regard the Gros Ventre as the northernmost one of a group of five closely affiliated or related tribes of which they themselves form the largest. Three of these tribes have long been extinct as separate bodies, and only the dialects of one or two survive among a few individuals with the Arapaho. The Gros Ventre, perhaps

[1] A. L. Kroeber, The Arapaho (Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. XVIII, Parts I, II, and IV. New York, 1902, 1904, and 1907). A series of Gros Ventre myths and tales has been published in Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. I, Part III. New York, 1907.

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101 because they have among them no such remnants of perishing tribes, appear
to know nothing of this fivefold group, but they recognize their close rela-
648 tionship to the Arapaho. There is no very great amount of intercourse between them and the Arapaho at present, nor does there appear to have been any unusual amount of communication during the greater part of the nineteenth century; but on both sides there is a mutual recognition as of separated relatives. The Arapaho are now and apparently have been for a long time considerably the larger tribe, the Gros Ventre having always in
[161] historical times been regarded as a small body. Their present number is about 550.

131 According to Hayden, the Gros Ventre, about 1800, were south of the
648 Saskatchewan; about 1820 they united with the Arapaho for a few years, and then, following a quarrel, journeyed north, had a disastrous encounter with the Crow, and became neighbors and allies of the Blackfeet.[1] In spite of the usually close association of the Gros Ventre with the three Blackfoot tribes since that time, they became hostile to them for a time, about forty years ago, and united against them with their own long-standing enemies the Crow. In the course of this hostility the Gros Ventre sustained their heaviest reverse in war within their memory; the greater part of an unusually large war-party, including many Crow, being killed after an attack on a Piegan camp. This happened in 1867, according to Grinnell. The usual enemies of the Gros Ventre, besides the Crow, were other Siouan tribes, such as the Dakota and especially the Assiniboine. They also fought more or less with the Shoshone, and no doubt in alliance with the Blackfeet against the Salish Flathead. They were on the whole friendly with the tribes of their own stock of speech, the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Blackfeet, and Cree. The habitat of the Gros Ventre in recent times has been the Milk River territory, in which is situated their present reservation, which they occupy jointly with the Assiniboine.

The Gros Ventre have also been called Fall, Rapid, and Paunch Indians.
101 The term "Gros Ventre" has also been applied to the Minitari, a Siouan village tribe on the Missouri; and the two tribes have been distinguished as "Gros Ventre of the Prairie" and "Gros Ventre of the Missouri."

174 Gros Ventre tradition brings the tribe from the north; but their story of
131 the division of the tribe while crossing the ice on a great river is found also
[193] among the Blackfeet and the Cheyenne, and is worthless as historical evidence. While their earliest habitat known is north of their present territory, acquaintance of them goes back little more than a century, and there is

[1] See the excellent article by H. L. Scott on The Early History and the Names of the Arapaho, in the American Anthropologist, N.S., IX, 545, 1907. From this it appears that, at least from the middle of the eighteenth century on, except for about five years' association with the Arapaho (from 1818 to 1823), the habitat of the Gros Ventre was in the Blackfoot country, between the Saskatchewan and the Missouri.

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nothing to show that they had long been in the Saskatchewan region. All that is certain of their previous past is their closer relationship to the Arapaho than to any other tribe; and the origin of the Arapaho is equally obscure, except that it is certain that, if they came from the north and east, it was a long time ago. Of the Gros Ventre it can only be said that, while related to the Arapaho and regarded by them as almost politically a part of themselves, they were far separated from them when first known, with them for a short time later, and again separated, and in contact and alliance with another much more distantly related Algonkin branch. Their habitat in a hundred years has been successively near the Saskatchewan, the Platte, and the Missouri. There is nothing to show that such variability of affiliation and location within the culture region of the Plains has not been characteristic of their previous history.

The Gros Ventre call the tribes near them by the following names: Arapaho, hinan'ăn (in Arapaho, hinanaci-na"); Cheyenne, itisön, "scars" (itisö", "a scar;" Arapaho name of the Cheyenne, hitaciina"); Cree, na"tsa", "rabbits;" Ojibwa, djinhuna"tsa", "Lower Cree;" the three Blackfoot tribes, waotä"nixtääts, "black-feet" (a Blackfoot, waotä"nixtänin, "black-foot-man;" a Piegan, tsä"t'; the Bloods, ka"winähää"); Assiniboine, na"djincihin; Sioux, na"wina"djinci, "Below-Assiniboine" (in Arapaho, na"tinci, "a Sioux"); Crow, hounen, "crow-men;" Minitari, wuxnokayan, "—lodges;" Shoshone, sösöuyänin, "snake-men;" Bannock, waotä"nixiinin, "black-men" (in Arapaho the Ute are called wootänähiçi, "black"); Flathead Salish, kaakaäänin, "flathead-man;" Nezperecé, taniibats, "pierced-nose" (Arapaho taniibääçi is the Caddo). Two tribes to the southwest or perhaps west, which have not been identified, are the wasöi"hiiyeihits, "grass-dwellers," who live in houses of grass or brush; and the na"wuxa-antibiina"ts, "fish-eaters."

The Gros Ventre were divided into groups similar to those of the Blackfeet and Sioux. The names of these bands were nicknames, and in no way totemic. As there was prohibition of marriage within the band, the name "clan" is, however, applicable to them. Descent was paternal and a man belonged to his father's band; but the prohibition of marriage extended also to his mother's clan, all the members of both the father's and mother's clan being considered relatives. Each band seems to have had a recognized head or chief. During the winter the tribe broke into smaller groups, consisting of one or perhaps more clans, which followed the buffalo, and camped chiefly in the timber. There corrals were made for the horses at night to prevent their being stolen by war-parties. When summer came, the clans joined and camped together in the large camp-circle. In this, the opening of which was toward the east, the different bands had definite

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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INTRODUCTION

The Algonquian-speaking Gros Ventres live on the Fort Belknap Reservation in North Central Montana. The Reservation is a small part of the land claimed by this tribe in 1887, when the boundaries were finally fixed. At present, the Gros Ventres number between a thousand and eleven hundred, and they share their territory with almost as many Assiniboine. The latter tribe was included in the settlement of the Reservation although it did not participate with the Gros Ventres and Blackfoot tribes in the Treaty of 1855. In spite of some intermarriage, the two groups have never really blended and the Gros Ventres tend to center at the village of Hays at the southern part of the Reservation while the Assinboine are clustered around Lodge Pole, a settlement some ten miles east of Hays. The Indian Agency is approximately forty miles north of Hays at the northern boundary of the Reservation and close to the town of Harlem on the Great Northern Railroad. Of importance to the Gros Ventres, who are predominantly Roman Catholic, is St. Paul's Mission and School which lie at the foot of the Little Rockies only a mile south of Hays. David Rodnick has given an excellent description of the geographical setting of the Reservation for his study of modern conditions and of acculturation among the Fort Belknap Assiniboine.

Of the several tribes in the Northern Plains region, the Gros Ventres are perhaps the least known. Although they maintained intact their tribal identity, and were recognized as fierce warriors, they were often mistakenly identified with the Blackfoot tribes, with whom they were frequently allied. Moreover, little was known of the Gros Ventre language except that it was an exceedingly difficult one; practically every independent observer during the nineteenth century remarks on this fact. Since, however, many Gros Ventre men knew Blackfoot, the linguistic difference was often overlooked and the Gros Ventres tended to be counted as one of the Blackfoot tribes. As part of the so-called "Blackfoot Nation," leaders of the Gros Ventres signed the Treaty of 1855.

[P. viii contains no text]

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Location in the Eighteenth Century

The earliest available sources show that in the eighteenth century the Gros Ventres were in the Canadian plains region, far removed from their Arapaho kinsmen. Just where or when the Gros Ventres and Arapaho parted cannot be determined. As Kroeber has pointed out, their tradition of separating while crossing a large frozen body of water on which the ice broke, is not reliable, especially in view of similar traditions of tribal separations current among other peoples.[1] It is possible that there may be some truth in the tradition which Father De Smet had from the Gros Ventres in 1846, namely, that they had become separated from the Arapaho a hundred and fifty years before that date.[2] This would allow, however, only the bare minimum of time which Kroeber has suggested as necessary to account for the linguistic differentiation between Arapaho and Gros Ventre. It would seem a little late also should Morton be correct in identifying as Gros Ventres the tribe, in the region of the Saskatchewan River to the west of the Assiniboine, whom Kelsey mentions in 1691.[3]

The difficulty of exactly locating the Gros Ventres during the first half of the eighteenth century is all the greater in view of the fact that the observers often used general terms, rather than tribal designations, for the plains peoples as distinct from the Cree and Assiniboine. Among such terms are "equestrian natives," "slaves," and various renditions of the Cree word *ayatchiyiniw*,[4] literally "foreign man, stranger"—the generic Cree term by which all hostile peoples are called. The Cree were closely as-

[1] Kroeber, 1908, p. 146.
[2] De Smet, p. 265, note.
[3] Kroeber, 1908, p. 145; Morton, p. 113; Kelsey Papers, p. 16, mentions a nation who "knew not ye use of Canoes and were resolved to go to wars."
[4] Cf. LaCombe, p. 325.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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101 sociated with the western expansion of the fur trade by both the English and the French, being dependent upon white goods and 174 acting as middlemen and interpreters. Consequently Cree words were used often by the traders. Mandelbaum explains, in regard to the generic term, that, since the Blackfoot in particular were the enemy tribe, this term came to be especially applied to them.[5] Nevertheless to interpret it as always and exclusively referring to the Blackfoot is misleading.

175 Isham, writing in 1743, after having been for a decade on the west coast of Hudson's Bay, used the generic term in a widely inclusive sense. He was anxious to get the "Earchthinue" to come to the English forts on the Bay to trade. He had never seen any of them except "a Slave, which was brought down by the Southwd. Indians,—their country lies on the back of this Land and to the Westward of the Churchill River where the Spaniards frequent those seas, at the same time does not traffick with that nation,—I have heard from the mouth of the said Slave concerning that country, by which I understood it was situated much as York Fort Hays's River with a fine Navigable River that op'ns into the sea, and with great plenty of the best and finest fur's, which is their Chiefest Commodity's. The Sinnepoets and other Indians Going to war with them, is a hinderance to their Coming to to the English Settlements to trade. . . ."[6] It was presumably from this Indian that Isham recorded two different ways to count ten. One such list he designated as being the "Earchithinu Language," and the other as "Earchethinue Language in another part of the Country."[7] The first can be identified as Blackfoot, in the general sense of the term,[8] but the second is apparently neither Blackfoot nor Gros Ventre.

Le Gardeur de Saint Pierre, successor of La Verendrye and the last of those who tried to find "the way to the sea" for the French, rendered the generic Cree term as "Iactchejlini" but in addition mentions the Gros Ventres by name. He spent the winter of 1751

[5] Mandelbaum, p. 166.
[6] Isham, p. 113.
[7] Idem, p. 35 and p. 36.
[8] Identification by my colleague, Prof. James A. Geary, personal communication, September 17, 1949.

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175 Cocking's party was friendly, these two indicated that they would persuade the rest of their group to come and meet with them. Bad weather delayed the arrival of the larger group, and meanwhile Cocking's companions tried, without avail, to fix and use a buffalo pound which the "archithinue" natives had built the previous spring. Finally, on December 1st,

> "Our Archithinue friends came to us and pitched a small distance from us; on one side of the pound 21 tents of them, the other seven are pitched another way. One of the Leaders talks the Asinepoet language well, so that we shall understand each other, as my Leader understands it also. This tribe is named Powestic-Athinuewuck (i.e.) Water-fall Indians. There are 4 Tribes, or Nations, more, which are all Equestrians Indians, Viz. Mithco-Athinuwuck or Bloody Indians, Koskitow-Wathesitock or Blackfooted Indians,—Pegonow or Muddy-water Indians & Sassewuck or Woody Country Indians."[14]

175 ●101 Thus Cocking gives a very good approximation of the Cree terms, applied even today to the Blood, Blackfoot, Piegan and Sarsi, as well as the designation used by the Cree for the Indians whom we call Gros Ventres.[15] Wissler, and, more recently Ewers, refer to this passage in Cocking and suggest that the Waterfall Indians are the Gros Ventres.[16] Any remaining doubts regarding the identification are dispelled by the following quotation from Umfreville who was with the Northwest Company in the area for four years from 1784–88 and who knew the various groups. He states regarding the "Fall Indians":

> "This nation is named by us and by the Nehethawa [Cree] Indians, from their inhabiting a country on the Southern branch of the river [Saskatchewan], where the rapids are frequent. As they are not very numerous, and have a harsh gutteral language peculiar to themselves, I am inclined to think they are a tribe that has detached itself from some distant nation, with which we are not as

[14] Cocking, pp. 110–11.

[15] Cf. Mandelbaum, p. 166. For an early and quite independent list and explanation of the same Cree terms, see Richardson's Journal of 1819–20, quoted verbatim by Franklin, pp. 99–100.

[16] Wissler, 1936, p. 6; Ewers, 1945, p. 289–99.

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> yet acquainted. In this people another instance occurs of the impropriety with which the Canadian-French name the Indians. They call them *gros ventres* or big bellies; and that without any reason, as they are as comely and as well made as any tribe whatever; and are very far from being remarkable for their corpulency." [17]

It so happens that the French name, "Gros Ventres," has been retained and at present is the most widely used designation for the tribe, although the Blackfoot term for them, "Atsina," is occasionally employed in recent ethnological sources. In the past, however, in addition to the French, translations of that term such as "Big Bellies," "Paunch Indians," and so on, occurred, as well as those derived from the Cree appellation,—"Falls," "Water-falls," or "Rapids Indians." To distinguish them from the village-dwelling Hidatsa, also known as Gros Ventres, sometimes they were called "Gros Ventres of the Prairies," or "Gros Ventres of Montana," in recognition of their later habitat.

Something of intertribal relations on the northern plains can be gleaned from the record Cocking has left us. It seems significant that he does not rate among the "equestrian natives" the Assiniboine whom he knew. Then, as later, the Assiniboine were apparently relatively poor in horses compared to the Gros Ventres and Blackfoot. Cocking mentions in regard to the Gros Ventres, whom he had opportunity to observe from December 1st to the 16th, 1772, that, not only at hunting buffalo but in all their actions, they excel his companions. He notes that the Gros Ventres are mounted on light sprightly animals and that they likewise use pack-horses, which give their women great advantage over the Cree and Assiniboine women "who are either carrying, or hauling on sledges, every day in the year." They impress Cocking as being more like Europeans and he remarks that they are more cleanly in clothing and food than his companions.[18]

The Assiniboine were, however, on account of their close association with the Cree, better armed; and the Gros Ventres were wary enough to ascertain the friendly intentions of Cocking's party

[17] Umfreville, p. 197.

[18] Cocking, p. 111. At this time too, Cocking says, the Gros Ventres used pottery of their own manufacture and tobacco which they themselves planted.

Feathers, especially eagle feathers, were highly prized, and red paint, prepared from ochre, as well as other paints obtained through the trader, played their part in bodily decoration.

The younger men thought a great deal of their appearance. One of the things they made for themselves was fancy painted sunshade-hats of rawhide. The designs painted thereon had a yellow background against which various other colors stood out. Coming Daylight remarked: "These sunshades looked so fine that the other tribes copied them, just like the whites get their styles from Paris." Long thick hair was the ideal both for men and for women. The tail of the porcupine made an admirable comb. A number of perfumes were used by the young men. The castor of the beaver, for instance, was put in the paint bag so that the material for daily painting would be sweet smelling. Again, young men crushed "Piegan berries," chewed them, and rubbed them on hair, horses, and bedding, as perfume.

Incidentally, according to Coming Daylight, in order to clean their buckskin clothing, the Gros Ventres would wear it into the water, getting it completely wet, and then rub it thoroughly with a certain kind of white clay.[14] She said that the tribe was spoken of by other tribes as always having such nice white clothes, and to this habit of rubbing them with clay she attributes the name by which the Gros Ventres call themselves, *a'aninin*, "white clay people."

Ear-rings, worn both by men and women, were made from imported abalone shell, which they cut up and shaped; they also used a certain type of imported white shell. Many other kinds of necklaces, armlets, and so on were apparently used, but on these we failed to get details.

Household and Transportation

The lodges of the Gros Ventres were made from buffalo hides, the number used in each depending on the size of the lodge. They

[14] This custom is mentioned in the sources of the early 19th century. Cf. Harmon, p. 277; Henry, v. 2, p. 734. The latter adds, as a further distinguishing characteristic, that when the Gros Ventres use red "it is always of a light color, inclining to pale vermillion. The dark red or Spanish brown, so much in vogue among the other Meadow tribes, does not suit their taste."